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ABSTRACT

A case study, part of a larger 5-year Excellence in English (EIE) research project, focused on the Dade County (Florida) School District's Division of Language Arts/Reading. Over a 2-year period, four middle and high school English programs in Dade County were studied as part of the EIE project; this part of the project focused on the professional lives of teachers and the practices that support student achievement, specifically describing the interactions between teachers and language arts/reading administrators in the Dade County schools. The study was carried out over one school year, September 1997 through June 1998. Results indicated that in the search for the philosophical base for interactions, three themes emerged: knowing what the research says and sharing it; knowing and staying grounded in the classroom through ongoing dialogues and interactions; and knowing what is good for students and teachers and having a passion for doing it. Data showed that administrators support language arts/reading teachers in four important ways: by bringing experts to the teachers; by seeing the teachers as experts; by developing expertise together through professional dialogues and workshops; and by letting the teachers know they are special. Comments of teachers and students give a sense of the positive impact of the interactions between the central office and teachers and students; assessments used in the district and across the state give a measurable sense of impact of these interactions on teaching and learning. (Contains 8 tables of data and 18 references.) (NKA)

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ED 432 771

CELA RESEARCH REPORT

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CENTRAL OFFICE LANGUAGE ARTS ADMINISTRATORS AND EXEMPLARY ENGLISH TEACHERS, AND THE IMPACT ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE

CARLA CONFER

CASE STUDY NUMBER 12003

NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER ON

ENGLISH LEARNING & ACHIEVEMENT

THE UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY ■ THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CENTRAL OFFICE LANGUAGE ARTS ADMINISTRATORS AND EXEMPLARY ENGLISH TEACHERS, AND THE IMPACT ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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I wish to express my gratitude to the exceptional district administrators and staff of the Division of Language Arts/Reading in the Miami-Dade Public Schools. Their descriptions of their journeys in search of excellence for themselves and for the teachers and students they serve are the heart of this report. The inspirational Norma Bossard, the irrepressible Sallie Snyder, and the invincible Zelda Glazer were especially generous with their time and their stories.

I would also like to thank educational specialists Connie McGee and Ethel Dickens for sharing their insights and data on Reciprocal Teaching. The eight Miami-Dade teachers who participated in the Excellence in English project also contributed to this report by reflecting on their professional relationships with the people "downtown." Without their perspectives, the picture would not have been complete.

C.C.

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The Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA) is a national research and development center located at the University at Albany, State University of New York, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Additional research is conducted at the Universities of Georgia and Washington.

The Center, established in 1987, initially focused on the teaching and learning of literature. In March 1996, the Center expanded its focus to include the teaching and learning of English, both as a subject in its own right and as it is learned in other content areas. CELA's work is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education, as part of the National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment.

This report is based on research supported in part under the Research and Development Centers Program (award number R305A60005) as administered by OERI. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Department of Education, OERI, or the Institute on Student Achievement.

9906-12003

In Memoriam

Norma Bossard
May 25, 1939 - June 19, 1999

All are architects of fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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FOREWORD

The district you will be reading about in this case study is a very special place. Middle and high school students in some of its most impoverished neighborhoods are actively involved in becoming highly literate; they are learning how language works in context and how to use it to advantage for specific purposes. And its teachers are supported in their efforts to improve their teaching and to grow as professionals.

What makes this kind of environment possible? A team of field researchers and I have been exploring this question in a major five-year project for the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA). This case study is one part of that project, which involves 48 other classrooms in 24 other English programs, nationwide. Each is providing English instruction to middle and high school students. Most are exemplary; some are more typical and give us points of contrast. Our study examines the contexts that lead to thought-provoking learning in English classes and the professional contexts that support such learning. This case report offers a portrait of the relationships between the Division of English Language Arts, the teachers it supports, and the subsequent impact on student achievement. We offer it to provide food for thought and a model for action for readers or groups of readers who wish to improve the English language arts learning and achievement of students in their own community.

Overall, the programs we are studying represent great diversity in student populations, educational problems, and approaches to improvement. The reports and case studies that come out of this project (listed on the reverse) together provide a conception of what "English" is as it is enacted in the classrooms of our best teachers, how these teachers have reconciled the various voices and trends within the professional community in their own practices, how their schools and districts support and encourage their efforts, and how in turn the contexts they create in their classrooms shape the high literacy learning of their students. The results have implications for curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as policy decisions, in English and the language arts.

For my first cross-cutting report, *Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers' Professional Lives Support Student Achievement* (CELA Report #12002), I analyzed the data across all case studies for overarching patterns. In it, I identify and discuss particular features of teachers' professional experiences that permeate these special programs.

I am profoundly grateful for the cooperation and vision of the teachers and administrators who contributed their time and ideas so generously and so graciously to this project. It was indeed a privilege for the field researchers and me to enter into their worlds of learning — a place I now invite you to visit and learn from in the following pages.

Judith A. Langer
Director, CELA
May 1999

Related Reports/Case Studies from the Excellence in English Research Project

12002 *Excellence in English in Middle and High School: How Teachers' Professional Lives Support Student Achievement.* Judith A. Langer.

The following site-specific case studies profile teachers, teams of teachers, and central office administrators. These and others will be available beginning in spring 1999.

12003 *Interactions between Central Office Language Arts Administrators and Exemplary English Teachers, and the Impact on Student Performance.* Carla Confer.

12004 *Beating the Odds Over Time: One District's Perspective.* Sallie Snyder.

12005 *A Middle School Teacher Never Stops Learning: The Case of Cathy Starr.* Eija Rougle.

12006 *Vocational School English Teacher Engages Students in Higher Level Reading and Writing: The Case of Janas Masztal.* Steven Ostrowski.

12008 *Collegial Support and Networks Invigorate Teaching: The Case of Marsha S. Slater.* Ester Helmar-Salasoo with Sally Kahr.

12009 *Forging Connections to Advance Literacy in the Middle School: The Case of Rita Gold.* Steven Ostrowski.

12010 *Interdisciplinary Cluster as Professional Network: Three Middle School Teachers in a Two-Way Bilingual Program.* Gladys Cruz.

For an up-to-date listing and current availability, visit the CELA website: http://cela.albany.edu or call 518-442-5026.

Interactions between Central Office Language Arts Administrators and Exemplary English Teachers, and the Impact on Student Performance

Carla Confer

This case study, which focuses on the Dade County (FL) School District's Division of Language Arts/Reading, is part of the larger five-year Excellence in English (EIE) research project directed by Judith Langer of the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement. Over a two-year period, four middle and high school English programs in Dade County were studied as part of the EIE project; this part of the project focused on the professional lives of teachers and the practices that support student achievement (Langer, 1999).

Introduction

Hargreaves (1994) has pointed out the need for the "working lives of teachers to be organized not around principles of hierarchy and isolation, but ones of collaboration and collegiality." One of the planes on which this needs to happen is between teachers and the administrators within their districts. However, school reform efforts have more often been focused on structural changes that, by themselves, have little chance of success and do even less to support the professional development of teachers (Peterson, McCarthy, & Elmore, 1996; Corcoran & Goertz, 1995; Cuban, 1990a; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Fullan, 1991; Elmore, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1996). In order to rectify this state of affairs, we need to understand the role that collaboration and collegiality play in the development of teachers as professionals. We need to study the cultures within the schools that help "transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways of solving persistent problems" (Cuban, 1990b) and to look at these ways of doing things from the perspectives of the participants (Roemer, 1991; Richardson, 1994). In other words, we need to build pictures, from the inside, of what these collaborative and collegial interactions look like.

This paper describes the interactions between teachers and language arts/reading administrators in the Dade County (FL) School District. The seeds for the study were sown during the first year of the Excellence in English (EIE) research project when a greater than usual degree of professional interaction between the personnel of Dade County's Division of Language

Arts/Reading and the Dade County teachers participating in the project was noted. The director, instructional supervisors, and educational specialists of the Division of Language Arts/Reading were often cited as the sources of strategies and materials that teachers were using in their classrooms. It was also clear that this central office staff seemed to have an exceptional knowledge of the teachers and classrooms within this very large district. It was often difficult to find the instructional supervisors in their downtown offices because of the amount of time they regularly spend in schools and classrooms. Because of these indicators, it was decided that the strong working relationship between the teachers and the central office professionals, and the impact it might have on student performance, needed to be further investigated within the larger EIE research project.

The investigation revealed that not only does the central office staff continually work to refine their own skills and philosophy, but they also work diligently to devise ways of sharing this expertise with the language arts and reading teachers in the district. These efforts contribute significantly to the professional development of the teachers and to the academic performance of a high minority, low socioeconomic level student population. The students in Dade County are outperforming their counterparts in other districts in the state, particularly in the area of writing; and they are holding their own in other academic areas, as well. Overall, they are "beating the odds."

The purpose of this case study was to gather information in order to describe the nature of the interactions between central office staff and teachers and how these interactions ultimately affect student performance. The guiding questions were: 1) what is the philosophy that guides the interactions between the Division of Language Arts/Reading staff and district teachers? 2) what is the nature of the interaction? and 3) what are the effects on student performance?

METHOD

This study was carried out over the course of one school year, September 1997 through June 1998. The data-gathering techniques included interviews in person as well as email exchanges with central office language arts administrators and EIE study teachers, observations of central office language arts staff, collection of data from the State Department of Education, and

collection of documents created by central office staff. The study is also contextualized at the state, district, and central office levels.

State Context

Florida has historically been rated among the lowest performing states in the country with regard to its educational programs and requirements for teachers (*Report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future*, 1996). At the state level, efforts to improve the quality of educational programs in Florida began in 1968 with the passage of the Educational Accountability Act. In order to carry out the instructions of this statute, the Commissioner of Education made subsequent recommendations to the State Legislature. These recommendations allowed the State Department of Education to develop procedures to assess the educational programs offered by the public schools and to develop methods to assess the progress of students at various levels. The first statewide reading assessment in 1971 tested grades two and four and was based on items from a catalog of reading objectives supplied by the Center for the Study of Evaluation, University of California, Los Angeles. In 1974, efforts were made to obtain nationally normed data on Florida students. To obtain this data, Florida closely replicated the reading and mathematics portions of the U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress test on a total sample size of 1,758 nine-year-olds, 1,714 thirteen-year-olds, and 1,755 seventeen-year-olds.

At the same time the state was attempting to collect the nationally normed data, it was also continuing its efforts to develop statewide assessments. By the fall of 1977, eighth and eleventh graders were also taking a statewide basic skills test. Dade County developed the test item specifications for these grade-level tests. In addition to testing the basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, work was also being done in the early 1980s to develop a Writing Production Assessment. These early efforts eventually resulted in the development of the Florida Writes! Exam which is now in its fifth year of administration.

The struggle to create statewide standards and assessments that would have an impact on the quality of education in Florida finally led to the passage of the Sunshine State Standards in 1996. These standards provide common goals and direction for education in Florida. They also

establish a framework of accountability and clearly outline what students are expected to know and be able to do at certain stages of their school careers.

To promote accountability to the standards, the State has developed the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) to measure how well students are learning based on the concepts outlined in the standards. The test includes multiple choice items, math problems, and essay questions. Beginning in 1998, it will be given to all students three times during their academic careers – at fourth, eighth, and tenth grades. Eventually, the test will be added to the list of tests that are used to measure how well school reform and accountability are working across the state.

This description of state efforts to improve the quality of education in Florida through the development of standards and tools for assessment is included in this study because the direction taken by the State Department of Education shapes the role that the Division of Language Arts/ Reading in Dade County must take as they work with teachers to provide the best educational experiences possible for the students within their district. To this end, both administrators and teachers in the Division of Language Arts/Reading have taken an active role at the state level, not only representing the needs of their district, but also contributing to the development of the standards and assessments.

District Context

As one of the largest school districts in the nation and the largest in Florida, Dade County has close to 350,000 students and 20,000 teachers. The racial/ethnic student membership is 13.5% White (Non-Hispanic), 33.6% Black (Non-Hispanic), 51.4% Hispanic, 1.3% Asian/ Pacific Islander, and .08% American Indian/Alaskan Native (State Department of Education, Fall 1996). Waves of immigrants from the Caribbean and Central America, many with little formal education, have contributed to the exploding population of Dade County Schools.

Compared with the other largest counties in the state, Dade County has the highest percentage of minority students and of free/reduced lunch students. Tables 1 and 2 show some of the comparative data among these large districts:

Table 1: Enrollment and Minority Comparisons among the Six Largest Districts in the State

District	Enrollment	% Minority
Dade County	341,120	86.5
District #2	218,576	52.6
District #3	147,788	44.0
District #4	137,600	46.2
District #5	128,947	46.3
District #6	126,100	49.3

Compiled from data from State Education and Accountability Services

Table 2: Percent of Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch Across the Six Largest Districts

	Dade County	District #2	District #3	District #4	District #5	District #6	State Averages
Elem. Schools	70.7	42.2	56.6	36.8	54.8	56.1	52.4
Middle Schools	64.4	42.3	50.1	29.5	50.0	48.6	44.2
High Schools	32.5	21.4	29.8	24.4	16.5	19.1	n/a

Compiled from data from State Education Information and Accountability Services

The enrollment in the other 61 districts in the state ranges from 100,135 for District #7 to 1,009 for District #67. The state average for percent of minority students is 43.3%. Thirteen of the 67 districts have minority percentages above the state average. There were seven other districts with minority enrollments above 43.3%, but because of their small total enrollments (ranging between 9,000 and 1,000), and because they had no large urban center, they were not used for comparative purposes elsewhere in this study. District # 7, although over 100,000 in total enrollment, was not used because its minority population was significantly lower (24.9%) than the other largest districts.

Within this context of high minority, low socioeconomic level, Dade County has long been recognized as being on the cutting edge of educational innovation. It was one of the first districts in the country to decentralize on a large scale and become a model for shared decision making (Fiske, 1991). District personnel have worked closely with local universities to bring educational research and practice closer together. Local leaders have been instrumental in shaping state mandates, state standards, and state assessments. Their dedication to their work has resulted in Dade County students performing at or above state averages on many of the statewide assessment tests and outperforming their socioeconomic counterparts from other districts, specifically on the Florida Writes! Exam (see Tables 5 & 6, pp. 28-29).

Central Office Context

In the Division of Language Arts/Reading of the Dade County School District there are six instructional supervisors, three educational specialists, three secretaries, and the director. According to the Comprehensive Reading Plan (January, 1998), the responsibilities of this department include: writing and updating the Competency-Based Curriculum and its assessment items; designing developmental reading courses; writing summer school curriculum; writing curriculum support materials; designing prevention and intervention models; developing partnerships with post-secondary faculties; providing staff development in reading and writing; sponsoring districtwide reading activities; providing guidance in the evaluation of language arts/-reading/ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programs; facilitating the selection of textbooks; remaining current in the field of literacy education; and supporting district initiatives.

Recently, 18 reading specialists were added to the staff. Their assignment is to support the Comprehensive Reading Plan adopted by the Board of Education in January 1998, and their responsibilities include: serving as liaisons between Region, the Division of Language Arts/ Reading, and the schools to articulate and implement reading plans; coaching/demonstrating reading lessons as appropriate; becoming trainers in content area reading strategies and strategies recommended by the district; working with the Reading Leaders in the elementary schools to provide staff development and parental involvement workshops; and assisting schools with interpreting and following up reading assessments.

Several members of the division have also been active at the state level, contributing to the development of the Sunshine State Standards that were adopted by the State Board of Education in May 1996, and contributing to the development of statewide assessments, particularly the Florida Writes! Exam and the FCAT. Their involvement in the development of these statewide assessments from the conceptual level through the item selection and scoring rubrics gives this department an edge in knowing how to support the teachers as they work with the students to gain the skills necessary for succeeding on the tests.

Participants

The members of the Division of Language Arts/Reading who became the primary subjects for this case study were the director, Norma Bossard; one of the instructional supervisors, Sallie Snyder; and two educational consultants, Connie McGee and Ethel Dickens. They each brought over 20 years of classroom experience to their jobs in the district office. Snyder had also served as a department chair and an assistant principal before joining the central office. Each of the participants, while fulfilling many roles within the district, has an area of expertise for which they are recognized. This is true for all central office staff. The eight Dade County teachers who were part of the Excellence in English research project (Shawn DeNight, Rita Gold, Susan Gropper, Kathy Humphrey, Chris Kirchner, Karis MacDonnell, Janas Masztal, and Gail Slatko) also contributed feedback for this case study, as did a former director of the Division, Zelda Glazer.

Data Collection

In order to explore the philosophical base of the subjects for the case study and to determine the nature of their interactions with teachers, the participants were interviewed on several occasions. On two occasions, arrangements were made for interviews with people who were key to the philosophical and functional development of the department, but were not on staff themselves. Staff were also observed as they made presentations to groups of teachers and

interacted with them in more informal ways. Documents that provided a framework for, and evidence of, the kinds of work done by the staff were also collected as were documents that provided evidence for student achievement.

Interviews. While the specific questions varied from interview to interview, the basic issues that were addressed were: 1) where do the ideas come from that guide your interactions with the teachers? 2) what is the nature of these interactions? and 3) how do the interactions impact the students' learning? Audiotapes were made of the interviews and were transcribed for further analysis.

The teacher participants were asked to respond to these questions: 1) how do the people in the district office support your professional development? 2) is there anything special about your interactions with the district office staff? and 3) what are some of the ways your students have benefited from your interactions with the staff? Teachers responded to the questions via email or telephone conversations.

Observations. Each of the participants was observed as they carried out a presentation or a workshop for the teachers. Audiotapes were made of the presentations and parts were transcribed for further analysis.

Collection of Reports and Documents. Because much of the work that is carried out by district staff is driven by statewide efforts to improve education, the State Department of Education Internet website was accessed. The history of assessment efforts at the state level, ethnographic information, and assessment results of statewide tests were downloaded for further analysis.

At the local level, documents that were developed by the district staff were collected. These included materials that were designed by the staff to be used by teachers to help students develop skills in targeted areas, materials for staff to use with teachers to help them develop their understandings of state mandates and assessment procedures, and documents written for the purpose of articulating the direction for the language arts/reading programs within the district.

Results

Philosophical Base for Interactions

Questions that were asked of the case study participants were "Where does your philosophy come from?" and "What drives the way you do things in the Language Arts/Reading Division?" Three themes emerged as the participants talked about the questions: 1) knowing what the research says and sharing it, 2) knowing and staying grounded in the classroom through ongoing dialogues and interactions, and 3) knowing what's good for students and teachers and having a passion for doing it.

Knowing and Sharing the Research. The current director, Norma Bossard, and instructional supervisor, Sallie Snyder, give much of the credit for the guiding philosophy of the Division of Language Arts/Reading to the former director, Zelda Glazer. Glazer surrounded herself with people who knew they needed to break away from the basal, publisher-driven, reading series, and she encouraged her staff to become "experts" in the field of language and learning by keeping current with the research in the field. Bossard continues this tradition by selecting people for the central office staff who are constantly looking for ways to improve instructional practices in English by using the literature on teaching and learning as a base for that practice.

All of the staff members subscribe to a number of professional journals and magazines. They also expect the language arts/reading teachers in the district to do the same. According to Bossard, "We make it real important to them to join one of the organizations so basically they get either *The Reading Teacher*, *Language Arts*, or *The English Teacher*." When asked *how* they made it important, Bossard replied, "We let them know that that's the standard . . . that you are a professional, and a professional joins the professional organizations and reads the literature. People just kind of do it because you say it, you expect it."

In addition to the literature already mentioned, Bossard named a few other works that have influenced her thinking about teaching and learning. She cites: Nancy Atwell's *In the Middle* (1987), Linda Rief's *Seeking Diversity* (1992), the work of Carol Santa in the CRISS (CReating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies) Project, the writings of Kenneth and Yetta Goodman, a book called *Teachers on the Cutting Edge*, *Writing the Natural Way* by Gabrielle

Rico (1983), the research of Palinscar and Brown on Reciprocal Teaching, and the work of Langer and Applebee at the National Research Center on English Learning & Achievement.

Bossard notes that she remembers the articles she has read more by theme than by author. Because so much reading goes on among the staff in her division office, she feels that she doesn't need to "be up on everything that comes through, because somebody else in the group will be and will ask me if I've read X or Y, or they will just put it on my desk."

When asked if the people in the district office had any formal ways of sharing their reading with each other or with the teachers, Bossard said that they had thought of dividing up some of the journal reading so that instead of everyone needing to read all the journals, they could simply share with each other. She says that didn't really work because nobody gave up their subscriptions to the journals they were already getting, but she thinks it may have been the genesis for passing articles around.

Opportunities to talk about journal articles often don't happen at the time they are being read. Instead, Bossard says that when a project is in the works and they are looking for ideas, references to articles or the articles themselves are used to enhance the work. The discussion, it seems, takes place when the literature has practical value. Also, articles are shared in timely ways. For example, Bossard says that when she was working on a project that would help teachers understand how to question for the FCAT, she decided to use a chapter from Sandra Cisnero's *House on Mango Street* as a central piece. Someone in the office, knowing her focus, put an article on her desk about Cisnero's real house. She says "We are so in touch that we know that she's working on that theme, so here's this, and here's that. We feed each other."

When Snyder, an instructional supervisor, was asked how ideas were shared among her colleagues, her response was nearly the same:

> We share through conversation, through xeroxing copies of really good articles. We get articles from one another with little notes on them. To do that efficiently, you have to know what their focus is. . . . So much of the sharing happens when we are working collaboratively with each other, developing workshops, writing curriculum. It's in those circumstances that I say, 'Have you read this wonderful article? Let me get it for you.'

Efforts are also made to share some of the literature with the teachers, often through the department chairs or elementary grade level leaders: "We look for articles to share with teachers as well. We don't want to bombard them with a lot of researchy stuff, but when something is good, then we share it."

The central office takes a strong leadership role in selecting front-line literature for the teachers, literature that will work for them. The sharing may be as informal as a short dialogue about an article in a social setting, or, since the district office staff have the freedom to design workshops, it may be as formal as incorporating what they are learning from the literature into a workshop for teachers. This way, they are not only making visible to the teachers the practical application of theory and strategy, but they are also developing an intellectual connection with the teachers based on the literature. This intellectual connection is enhanced through ongoing dialogues between teachers and supervisors as teachers apply what they are learning from the literature to their classrooms. These dialogues are of mutual benefit and enhance the collegiality between teachers and administrators.

Knowing and Staying Grounded in the Classroom. Bossard (present director), Glazer (former director), and Snyder (instructional supervisor) all agree that the success of their division is the result of staying grounded in the classroom. The decisions they make as administrators are all made through the lens of how something will play out in the classroom. As Bossard noted:

> The greatest strength of our team is that we all channel everything through what we know about the classroom. There is little that gets by us that is just theoretical. And if we even begin to spin off that way, somebody brings us right back to earth.

They are able to do this because five of the six instructional supervisors have come to administration with approximately 20 years each of classroom experience. They also spend a great deal of time in classrooms. Snyder noted that "there are whole departments for whom that's just not true. There are total offices that just haven't been in the classroom for so long – and don't want to be."

According to Glazer, being in the classroom was not always standard procedure for the Division of Language Arts/Reading:

> When I first got the job as supervisor, the whole set-up downtown was different. One of the people I worked with was very smart, very knowledgeable, very current in her information. There was nothing ossified about her, but at that time I think every one accepted the bureaucratic paradigm or whatever it was, which was that you didn't go into a school unless you were invited. And that was one of the first things she told me. "Don't come on like gangbusters. You're not going to get into schools. They don't want you, and downtown, the administration doesn't want you to." So that was where we were coming from, being totally disconnected. . . . It was a big jump that we took when we decided that was no way to function, just being downtown. But getting into the classrooms, getting close to the teachers, was my ideal.

Glazer began to bring people into the administration from the classroom who would rather have stayed in the classroom. Both Bossard and Snyder say that they only agreed to take on the responsibility because they knew that they could request to return to the classroom at any time. Bossard claims that every one of the supervisors is so rooted in the classroom that any could go back to teaching at a moment's notice and do a fine job.

Another aspect of the work of the central office staff that keeps them grounded is that, of necessity, there is a crossover of responsibilities among the three secondary and three elementary instructional supervisors. Because there are more elementary than secondary schools in the district, it has been necessary for the secondary supervisors to assume some responsibilities for the elementary schools. Elementary supervisors are encouraged to take on some secondary responsibilities to help them get the big picture as well. Snyder, a secondary level supervisor, says she is beginning to feel like a grade 3-12 person because of her experiences in the elementary classrooms. When asked if this stretching was an advantage or disadvantage to her job, she responded:

> I see it as a tremendous advantage, for me personally. . . . When an eighth grade teacher says to me, "Well, what we're doing to get our kids ready is that in the sixth grade, they are writing sentences, and in the seventh grade, they're writing paragraphs, and then in the eighth grade, we try to get them to write essays." And I can say to them, "I know in the fourth grade, they are writing stunning essays. Why are you just doing the sentences in sixth grade?" You know, it's one thing to hear these things, and it's another to see it and live it and know it – to have the experience to know what is going on in the fourth grade classroom or the third grade classroom. Another typical example is when a middle school, or senior high teacher says, "Well, when I mention apostrophes, or prepositions, or whatever, these kids have never heard of them," and I can say, "I have been in third grade classrooms where these kids are identifying the prepositional phrases and underlining them. Believe me, they've had this every year. They may not tell you that." You know, you can't say that if you haven't seen it. So it's been wonderful to get this experience. I think one of the reasons it's happened for me personally, is that we've done it primarily in writing, the dropping down, and I suspect it's because the elementary supervisors historically have been reading supervisors, and writing was not part of their territory, and so what we've done is sort of drop them into the fold so that now they own 'write' things as much as they own 'read' things.

When teachers attend workshops such as the annual two-week summer Writing Institute, offered by the Division of Language Arts/Reading, they have the option of asking for a demonstration lesson if they have questions about applying workshop strategies or materials. By doing the demonstration lessons, the district office people not only provide an important service for the teachers, they also maintain a realistic picture of what it is to be a teacher in a classroom.

Bossard summed up her feelings in a recent issue of the Dade County Council of Teachers of English newsletter (*Pen Power*) after she had spent a morning in classrooms:

> Visiting classrooms keeps me grounded in what is important in the system and provides concrete examples of what this office can do to support teachers in their work. What a pleasure it is to see materials developed with and for teachers not only being used, but being praised. How sobering to have teachers tell me their additional needs. I want to visit as many classrooms as possible this year.

Knowing What's Good and Being Passionate about It. The people in the Division of Language Arts/Reading in the Dade County School District are passionate about the work they do. Snyder, for example, feels that her enthusiasm for literature has influenced her work as a teacher and as an administrator. She says that reading Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* in high school was a turning point for her: "It was the first book I ever read where I was so passionately involved with the characters. I despised Heathcliff! It was a turning point for me to realize that literature had so much power."

As a teacher, Snyder wanted her students to feel the same power of literature, and as a language arts supervisor she wants teachers to be able to share that idea with their students. She talks about the role passion plays in good teaching:

> Yesterday we did an activity at the Department Head Meeting. . . . The question was "think about, write down one thing you believe about teaching, as part of your philosophy." I said that good teachers have passion for their students, their jobs, and their subjects in that order. I am so struck with that. Ironically, I had asked one of the project teachers if he would, to end the department head meeting, do a ten minute sort of uplifting talk about his first year as department head and make it inspirational. He was fabulous. It was wonderful. Education is his passion. I hadn't really thought about what makes him such an outstanding teacher until yesterday, and I think it is his passion. I'm not sure when in my career I realized that it is that commitment that makes you good, but there's no doubt about it. I suspect that it's true of music and art and every field of endeavor – the enthusiasm you bring to the work that you do.

As an instructional supervisor in the central office, Snyder tries to inspire the teachers in her workshops with some of the passion she herself has for students. She often uses a quotation when working with teachers to help them learn how to prepare for an assessment such as Florida Writes! Exam: "Kids can hit any target they are given, as long as they can see it and it sits still." This faith in students' abilities is part of the passion that Snyder sees as essential to being an excellent teacher.

Bossard, also, has a passion for literature – writing it, reading it, and teaching it. To read her vignettes or poems is to know that she understands the power of words to paint a picture of a way of life or to heal the soul. That others recognize her passion for words is evident in the introduction she was given as the Keynote Speaker at the 1998 Dade County Literary Celebration. Here is an excerpt from that introduction:

> Just introducing Norma as the district director of Language Arts and Reading won't really tell you who she is. What you need to know about Norma is this: Not only does she love to read for her own pleasure, but it gives her even greater pleasure when she shares that love of reading with others, especially children. Whenever you listen to her telling you about her reading with her grandchildren or her going to a classroom and reading aloud to children, her eyes light up, and you feel the experience. She transports you there.

The topic for Bossard's address was "Dade County's Comprehensive Reading Plan: What It Means to You." It quickly became evident that the focus of the speech was what the Reading Plan would mean for the children of the county in terms of their opportunities for learning. The fact that it would mean more work for the teachers, in her mind, was secondary to the benefits for the students. She believes that teachers need to be passionate about their work and this notion comes through loud and clear:

> A good teacher knows that all the teaching you do has to be wrapped up in a whole cloth, so that it is the whole child, the whole day. It is everything about him or her and your relationship to that child that is going to make a difference whether or not you are successful with them.

Like Snyder, Bossard believes that having a passion, or enthusiasm, for teaching is contagious. In trying to sum up what was outstanding about what she had seen teachers and students doing after visiting classrooms, Bossard wrote:

> The atmosphere of the classroom seems to be a direct reflection of students' activities and levels of involvement in learning. Bright rooms match enthusiastic teachers; dull, unattractive rooms match listless, unengaging instruction. Enthusiasm breeds enthusiasm. Where teachers are engaging, students are excited about what they are doing and are more deeply involved in the tasks. (*Pen Power*, Winter 1998).

Bossard not only wants teachers to be passionate and enthusiastic about their work, she wants them to believe that what they do can make a difference in the lives of their students. In her address to the teachers at the Literary Celebration, she read Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, "The Builders," to underscore this belief. This poem is included here since it captures the

role that the staff of the Division of Language Arts/Reading in Dade County has carved out for themselves.

The Builders
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

All are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;
Each thing in its place is best;
And what seems but idle show
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,
Time is with material filled;
Our todays and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these;
Leave no yawning gaps between;
Think not, because no man sees,
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part;
For the gods see everywhere.

Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
Make the house where gods may dwell
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete,
Standing in these walls of Time,
Broken stairways where the feet
Stumble as they seek to climb.

Build today, then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base;
And ascending and secure
Shall tomorrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain
To those turrets where the eye
Sees the world as one vast plain,
And the boundless reach of sky.

Nature of Interactions with Teachers

Not only do these administrators operate from a philosophical base that includes both theoretical and practical perspectives of education, they interact with teachers in special ways so that high levels of expertise can be attained. What emerged from the data was that these administrators support language arts/reading teachers in four important ways: by bringing experts to the teachers, by seeing the teachers as experts, by developing expertise together through professional dialogues and workshops, and by letting the teachers know they are special.

Bringing Experts to the Teachers. One of the groups of experts that is available to the teachers is the central office staff themselves. When they do workshops for the teachers, they bring their knowledge from their own years of classroom experience. They also bring their ever-expanding expertise on teaching language arts. Much of this expertise has grown out of their collaborations with each other, their dedication to staying current with the research, and their involvement with statewide efforts that affect the teachers and students in the district. They are constantly involved in honing these levels of expertise. For example, when Sallie Snyder was asked about the ways she builds her level of expertise, she responded:

> It happens in collaboration with my colleagues – Mickey Starett especially. She and I have had such a wonderful time – sometimes adversarial because we both have strong opinions. And working with Norma [Bossard]. If I need a good idea for something and I need a second brain to think about it with me, Norma is wonderful. They're the people I most often go to. I think that's a kind of "going to the well" thing. I think even in this job, the *English Journal* and *Educational Leadership* have been helpful, *Educational Leadership* more broadly. In the years when they were focusing on critical thinking, assessment, and portfolios and things like that, they were enormously helpful as a resource for my current job.

Norma Bossard also mentioned how she relies on staff members' expertise:

> Sallie is a great one to bounce ideas off of because she's thinking like you're thinking all the time. We do think differently, but we complement each other. She is more focused and specific, and I am off the walls. It helps to have her listen.

and about being encouraged to stretch herself beyond her elementary level of expertise:

> Zelda Glazer made me go beyond being an elementary teacher. She just insisted that I go into the high school end. I resisted but she insisted that the high school people needed to hear my perspective on teaching and learning. I actually did a "Big Book" presentation to a high school group – that was the first thing I did. I was a nervous wreck. But when they came up to me afterward and could tell me the implications they got for using a piece in their classroom and teaching that way, it blew me away. So I gained confidence. So I've done demonstrations in high school classrooms, and I don't have any feeling anymore that I am just elementary.

Another way that central office staff have developed their levels of expertise is by their involvement with statewide efforts to improve the quality of education. For example, Snyder belongs to the Council of Language Arts Supervisors, which is made up of supervisors from across the state. Her work in the Council led to being asked to work on the Sunshine State Standards and the Florida Writes! Exam. She attributes some of her expertise to that statewide

involvement. When asked if, when she worked with teachers on the Florida Writes! Exam, her background was coming from her work at the state level, she answered:

> Yes, and some of it comes by sharing with some of the language arts supervisors around the state. Some of it comes from knowing what ideas to steal. One of the things I "stole," with permission from them of course, was the way another district teaches their kids to plan for this kind of writing. It made good sense. It was a workable planning model. Everything else we've done [relating to the Florida Writes! Exam] is what we've put together.

Bossard has also worked at the state level, most recently in helping to develop the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Because she is intimate with what the test will require of students, she can design programs that will help students acquire the skills and knowledge they will need. When she combines this with her knowledge of what makes for good learning experiences for students, a plan evolves that will support teachers' development and students' learning. This is evident in the work she has done on the district's Comprehensive Reading Plan.

While this particular case study focuses on select members of the central office staff, these members represent the kind of commitment and involvement of the entire staff. All are constantly engaged in learning how to get better at what they do. When new members are added to the staff, they undergo extensive training to bring them up to speed. For example, 18 reading specialists were recently added to the staff to help implement the district's newly adopted Comprehensive Reading Plan. To ensure that these new staff members are able to support the teachers as they put the plan into action, the specialists have participated in two months of training. Part of their training has been to observe the instructional supervisors as they give workshops to the teachers in the schools. Another part of the training has been to participate in workshops themselves to learn more about the various reading/writing programs that are in place in some, but not all, sites within the district. Before going out into the field, they are expected to learn as much as possible about programs such as Accelerated Reader, Reciprocal Teaching, America Reads Tutorial Program, and CRISS (CReating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies). These new specialists are also being immersed in the standards, benchmarks, and assessment tools so they can bring their working understanding to every teacher in the district.

How then, do these experts from the central office share their knowledge with the teachers? The annual Writing Institute, a two-week workshop held immediately after school closes in June, is one of the major forums for bringing expertise in language arts, reading, teaching, and learning

to the teachers in the district. The institute provides opportunities for teachers to learn from their own district supervisors and administrators. A workshop given by a supervisor at the institute will often be followed up by a demonstration lesson in the classroom if requested by the teacher. This allows the teacher to observe the strategy in practice with her students. The teacher can also request to be observed as she implements a strategy, using the feedback she gets from the observation to hone her skills in the classroom. Teachers are expected to use what they learn in the institute and are given ongoing support from the central office staff as they apply new ideas in their classrooms.

In addition to being resources themselves for the teachers, the staff of the Division of Language Arts/Reading is also instrumental in bringing outside experts in the field to the district. For example, in the summer of 1997, the Dade County Public School contracted with a local university to design and deliver training to teachers in the 38 schools on the state's original list of Critically Low-Performing Schools. The project included a two-week summer institute, three half-day follow-up sessions during the school year, additional on-site training in selected schools, and classroom coaching/support for all participating teachers. All of the activities targeted skills and concepts needed for students to improve their writing skills and thus their performance on the state's writing assessment. As a result, students in schools where teachers participated in the project improved their performance on the Florida Writes! Exam. The impact of the project is described in the assessment section of this case study.

In addition to experts from local universities, the Division of Language Arts/Reading also invites consultants from universities across the nation, well-known authors from the fields of literature and education, top-notch consultants associated with various publishing companies, and teacher/consultants from the Bay Area Writing Project. Quite often, these experts are invited to be presenters or lecturers at the annual Writing Institute and have included such people as National Council of Teachers of English President Sheridan Blau; author/consultant Helen Hollingsworth; University of Arizona professor and well-known author Daniel Kirby; Penn State professor and internationally known speaker Maureen McLaughlin; and Center on English Learning & Achievement Director Arthur Applebee. This is not a complete list, but serves to illustrate the fact that Dade County invites experts in the field who are on the cutting edge of research in the fields of language arts, reading, literature, and learning.

In addition to having outside experts come to the district, the director of the Language Arts/ Reading division knows whom to call when she wants more information about new programs or strategies. "When I want to know more than what I'm getting from the literature, I simply pick up the phone and call someone at a university, or wherever, to get the information I need. I'm not going to bring something new to my teachers unless I've checked it out first."

Seeing the Teachers as Experts. One of the most significant aspects of the interactions between the central office and the teachers is that the central office celebrates and relies on the teachers as experts. They are quick to pay homage to the people in the trenches. Bossard says: "I think it's phenomenal that we have, I think probably, the deepest and most talented group of teachers in the county." Glazer adds: "I bet we could come up with a list of a hundred exemplary teachers."

Bossard, Glazer, and Snyder also understand how important it is to celebrate not only the teachers' expertise, but also to utilize it in ways that will benefit the most numbers of teachers and students possible. When the central office develops curriculum, it always brings exemplary teachers in to work on it. Bossard explains:

> We really use them in roles that let them know that they are needed. We ask these teachers to make presentations; we ask them to do writing projects for us, so that every piece of curriculum that has come out of our office has come from that pool of teachers as well. From elementary through secondary. At the drop of a hat, we can tell you 10 people any one of whom you could use in any position that you might ask. We can come up with names just like that.

Glazer cites a time during her tenure as director when the district office really depended on that pool of exemplary teachers:

> I remember when the state mandated a competency-based curriculum. When I was first handed that awful thing, I remember saying, "Where do we begin?" And so the people that we brought in to act as facilitators, we had enough people, enough department heads that we trusted, to build a curriculum model that satisfied the administration and that satisfied the state, but it was also consistent with everything we believed was important for teaching and learning. If we hadn't had those people to help us, I don't know what we might have come up with.

One of the obvious strengths of the Division of Language Arts/Reading staff is they are not afraid to share their status as experts with teachers. When the Writing Institute first began, the workshops within the institute were primarily run by central office people and experts from the

outside. The office staff had received their training from members of the Bay Area Writing Project, and this formed the basis for the workshops. To bring teachers to the same level of expertise, an initial group of 25 teachers, designated as "institute associates," was invited to return to the Writing Institute for a second year, not only to get new information, but to begin building presentations that they could take back to the schools.

To pay the extra expense of having the teachers attend a second year, Glazer applied for a grant that also provided substitute money for the Associates to leave their classrooms and go to other schools to do the presentations and workshops. According to Glazer, this was not only valuable as a way of disseminating more information to more teachers, but was also a factor in building the leadership skills of those teachers who were designated as associates. She says:

> I think in the long run, that it was less important to the teachers that came [to the workshop] for that one day, but so important in the leadership building of the people who were identified as associates to do this. So we ended up with a core of teachers that has now expanded to 50 associates. No other discipline has been able to build anything like this.

The schedule of events for this year's Literary Celebration is a testament to the number of English teachers in the district who are considered to be experts in specific areas. The Literary Celebration is cosponsored by the school district, the Dade County Council of Teachers of English, the Media Specialists Association, and the Reading Council. Of the approximately 30 workshops and presentations, 14 were given by local teachers. They were in illustrious company. Dr. Elliot Engel, Professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and founder and editor of *Writers Ink*; Dr. Judith Irvin, Florida State University; Jack Gantos, well known author of children's books; and an assortment of consultants from various publishing companies were among the outside experts who presented at the conference.

The topics presented by the teachers included strategies for integrating reading and writing, interacting across the disciplines, and promoting effective student writing. Techniques used included Reciprocal Teaching, CRISS strategies, using biography boxes, and using the Langer model for literary discussions. Many of the ideas in these presentations can be traced back to work that originated in the Language Arts/Reading Division office, but the teachers have brought their own levels of expertise to the ideas through practical applications in their classrooms.

When reading over the program for the Literary Celebration offerings, it is interesting to note that all of the speakers, including the teachers, were introduced in glowing terms by either central

office administrators or officers of the organizations that cosponsored the event. It was just one more indication of the high regard in which the teachers in this district are held.

Becoming Experts with the Teachers. Another way in which central office staff interact with teachers is by putting themselves in the same learning situations. Here is one example: For a number of years, the Museum of Science had run technology workshops for district science and math teachers. When the Division of Language Arts/Reading realized they also needed to learn about technology, they asked the museum staff to develop a workshop geared to English teachers. When the workshops were scheduled for the teachers, the instructional supervisors signed up for them as well. This provided an opportunity for the teachers to see the staff as learners. Perhaps more importantly, it provided an occasion for stronger bonds to be built between the central office and the teachers. It also gave the staff an opportunity to interact with the teachers over that four-day period in ways that would give them first-hand knowledge of new skills, tools, and strategies that the teachers might be attempting to use in their classrooms.

As the instructional supervisors get feedback from the teachers on how they are using technology, they build their list of teachers who are now in a position to share their expertise with other teachers. This might take the form of a workshop, or it might be as informal as Snyder suggesting to one teacher that she observe how another teacher is applying the strategy. None of this could happen without the intimate knowledge that these administrators have of their teachers.

Another example of central office staff becoming learners with the teachers happens at the Writing Institute when someone from the outside is invited to provide part of the training. As Bossard noted, "When we are not the presenters, we are the participants. We are right there with the teachers, doing the same workshops or listening to the same lecture. We need to know if this is something we need to become expert in so the whole district can get it."

Letting the Teachers Know They are Special. To observe any of the instructional supervisors giving a workshop to a group of teachers or to listen to them talk about past workshops is to understand the importance that is attached to the style with which a workshop is conducted. This style is characterized by the conscious effort the division takes to make teacher participants feel special. Bossard, Glazer, and Snyder say they learned how important this was from the University of Miami professor who helped them prepare for and organize the Writing Institute. They not only give her credit for the academic excellence of the institute, but claim that

they also learned from her one of the ways to make teachers feel special. "Nothing is too good for the teachers," she would say, according to Glazer. The professor used to find ways to get free flowers, fruit, or pencils and pads so that each participant would have at his or her place, for example, a rose one day, a sumptuous peach the next day, and a special pin another day. Bossard explains: "Every day at that institute teachers come in and find something else that is there for them. It's absolutely amazing. You know teachers; we don't care how tiny the thing is, somebody gave it to you so somebody cared enough. It makes a difference." Glazer says: "We never did do a workshop of any size without something, even if it was just some coffee and some cookies for the teachers that we brought, because there was no money in the budget to buy them." Bossard adds: "We would give out things at the door that we'd get free from publishers – Here's a notepad for being the first to arrive."

That this special treatment matters to teachers is evident in the kinds of responses teachers have had to the workshops. According to Glazer, one teacher wrote in her evaluation, "I have taught for 20 years, and I have never been treated this way in a workshop before, and I have never learned so much."

However, the little gifts are only a part of what makes teachers feel special. One of the teachers participating in this research project had this to say about his relationship with the central office:

> They make us feel special. When someone from the Division of Language Arts asks me to make a presentation or attend a workshop, because they know me personally, I assume that they have my best interests in mind. Maybe that's the key. It's hard to be a faceless bureaucrat to people whom you know personally and for whom there is mutual respect.

This teacher also commented that being tapped by the central office to do things such as participate in a research project, make presentations, or create a motivational video for the High School Competency Test was evidence that the central office "often thinks about us teachers in the field. They see us as resources both to be developed and to be utilized." To him, this equated with having a "fairy godmother" in the central office.

Another teacher who was recently recruited to be one of the reading specialists for the Division of Language Arts/Reading finds that she is made to feel special in her new group by having "a little piece of my own to add. I seem to be the one person in the office who has the most experience with the Accelerated Reader Program. Well, whenever we meet, any questions

about it are deferred to me. I've already been to one school to offer support. It's nice to be considered the 'point person.'"

Belonging to the Dade County Council of Teachers of English (DCCTE) is yet another way that teachers are made to feel special. At one time, the Council was practically nonexistent in the county; membership was negligible and people had no reason to join. When Snyder moved "downtown," one of her missions was to revitalize the Council. According to her, there were no by-laws and no mission statement. As district liaison to the Council, she was able to recruit people who would help make it a professional organization that would be worth joining. Not only is it now worth joining, but some teachers consider it an honor to be asked to hold an office in the organization. When asked about her membership in the DCCTE, one teacher responded this way:

> When DCCTE asked me to be recording secretary, well, I enjoy being with these people so much, the feeling that comes back, and the sense of professionalism, the opportunity to share the ideas, all this – I was thrilled to be asked.

Another teacher considers it an honor just to be a member of the group:

> I feel like I am a member of an elite group. These people [university professors, past and current administrators] are educational giants. I like being one of them. And every summer, at the Writing Institute, I believe we baptize more members into this special club.

Providing opportunities for teachers to interact with other professionals, especially when the group includes people considered to be "educational giants," is yet another way to make them feel special and to make teachers feel part of a highly professional group.

Impact of Interactions on Teachers and Students

Of course, the purpose for the interactions between central office staff and teachers is to support the teachers' professional development in ways that result in better teaching and learning experiences and improved performances for students. The data sources that were explored in determining the impact of the interactions on teachers and students were: 1) teacher and student comments and 2) assessment results.

Teacher and Student Comments. The Dade County teachers who have been participating in the Judith Langer's Excellence in English research project are positive about the value of the interactions, both formal and informal, that they have with the central office. They compare their experiences with teachers in their own district from other disciplines, and with teachers in their own discipline from other districts.

> Of all the disciplines, language arts is the only one that consistently presents meaningful and stimulating inservice on a wide variety of subjects, from improving test scores to the latest techniques for improving reading, to portfolio preparation. When I attend workshops or summer classes and lunch with colleagues from other subject areas, those from math or social studies groan in protest against the boredom and inanity of their workshops whereas language arts teachers in our district always cheer the thoughtful preparation and relevance of the presentations. The quality of the information, careful planning, commitment to excellence, attention to details, variety of activities, and involvement of participants that are always evident in presentations by all of our language arts supervisors have not only educated me, but have also served as role models for my own presentations. (Email, SG, 5/17/98)
>
> When I go to workshops or conferences outside the district, I am always amazed at how much we've already learned from our own people. Teachers from other districts are saying, "Wow! This is great! This is new!" and I'm saying, " Been there. Done that!" (Interview, JM, 5/21/98)
>
> So many of the things I do with kids (and adults I work with) are things I've learned from the crew downtown and from the Writing Institute. It is to hard to really pin them down. (Email, KMcD, 5/12/98)
>
> Another thing that distinguishes a workshop done by the district language arts folks vs. other presenters is that the language arts people provide you with practical activities to use in the classroom. Stuff I picked up in the Writing Institute over the years, and more recently in the CRISS workshops has found its way into my classroom. When a good idea starts in the Division of Language Arts, it really does trickle down into the classrooms and into the experiences of our students. (Email, SDeN, 5/8/98)
>
> All my writing instruction techniques came from what I learned in district workshops either directly from one of the language arts supervisors or from a colleague who attended a writing workshop. I know that all I did as a reading teacher was what I learned right here in Dade County, not what I learned in graduate school. (Email, GS, 5/12/98)
>
> I don't think I would even be inspired to read about the current trends and innovations in language arts if I wasn't motivated by the group "downtown." (Email, RG, 5/17/98)

While the above are general comments about the impact and quality of interactions between central office people and teachers, the following comments are from middle school teachers who participated in workshops designed and implemented by educational specialists Connie McGee and Ethel Dickens from the Division of Language Arts. The workshops focused on Reciprocal Teaching strategies. The purpose for using these strategies (predicting, clarifying, questioning,

visualizing, and summarizing) is to increase middle schools students' reading comprehension. The teachers had this to say:

> I think Reciprocal Teaching is effective for improving reading. It was easy for the students to predict and to picture the characters or situations in their minds. I believe the students were more motivated to read because we had specific purposes in mind.
>
> I will continue to use this strategy because it helps students think. Prediction was the strategy the students enjoyed most.
>
> Reciprocal Teaching helps students learn to read with more confidence in themselves and their ability to do well. All of the strategies are easy to implement.

These are just a few of several dozen comments from evaluation forms collected by the McGee and Dickens.

Students were also asked to evaluate the program. Their comments were also collected by the educational specialists, and include the following:

> Reciprocal Teaching has helped me a lot. As I read I understand the things that happen. It makes me feel great to read a story and understand what it was about.
>
> For me it was very helpful. First of all, I really didn't like to read. But after I read all the passages, I started to like to read.
>
> Reciprocal Teaching helped me with my reading. When I say this I mean the comprehension part. I used to read fast, but I didn't understand what I was reading.
>
> When I read a book now, I always try to predict what I am going to read about. Sometimes my predictions are right and sometimes they are wrong. When I make a picture in my mind it makes me feel good. I also ask myself questions as I read.
>
> Now I know how to do a summary without copying out of the book. I learned to read for understanding and not to read just so that I would get finished.

The comments of the teachers and students support the notion that the Division of Language Arts/Reading in Dade County plays an important role in the professional development of its teachers and the level of learning of its students. This role includes being on the cutting edge of new developments in the teaching of the discipline and sharing these developments in ways that have an impact on students' learning.

Assessment and Results. While the comments of the teachers and students can give a sense of the positive impact of the interactions between central office and the teachers and students, some of the assessments that are used in the district and across the state can give a measurable sense of impact of these interactions on teaching and learning. The results being reported here include: pre and post test results of the Reciprocal Teaching Strategies Workshops, comparison

of Dade County student performance with students from other counties across the state on the Florida Writes! Exam, pre and post intervention scores on the Florida Writes! Exam within the district, and a comparison of middle school norm-referenced test scores with middle schools in comparable districts.

Reciprocal Teaching (Reading Comprehension Pre and Post Testing Results). Teachers and students from eight middle schools participated in a Reciprocal Teaching project. The eight schools were selected from those that applied based on the low level of their Stanford Achievement Test reading comprehension scores. The project included 5,429 students, 229 teachers, 9 administrators, and 2 educational specialists from the central office. Table 3 indicates the gain or loss from pre test to post test scores for reading comprehension in the target schools.

Table 3: Gains in Reading Comprehension Scores in Eight Middle Schools after Reciprocal Teaching

School	% Gain
A	16
B	58
C	8
D	13
E	63
F	-33
G	-11
H	44
Net Gain	**19.75**

Data Source: Report to BOE by educational specialists

Six of the eight schools involved in the Reciprocal Teaching project fully supported the program and showed post test gains in reading comprehension averaging 31%. Support for the program in two of the schools was uneven, and post test scores were lower than pre test scores. As shown in Table 3, if the two schools who posted no improvement are included, the project resulted in an average gain of 19.75% across the eight schools. Six of the eight schools also improved an average of 3 points in reading comprehension on the districtwide standardized test after learning the reading strategies from the Reciprocal Teaching project.

Florida Writes! Exam. The Florida Writes! Exam was implemented in grades four, eight and ten as required by a law passed by the 1990 state legislature. The assessment is designed to measure students' proficiency in writing persuasive and expository essays in response to a prompt within a designated testing period. Writing assessment results are available beginning with the first statewide test in 1994.

Dade County has made concerted efforts since the early 1980s to support teachers' development of strategies for teaching writing skills, most notably through the annual Writing Institute. The Division of Language Arts/Reading has also developed workshops and materials that specifically address the writing strategies that are required for passing the Florida Writes! Exam. Given that there is a correlation between socioeconomic status and writing test scores, it has required much effort in Dade County to "beat the odds." Dade County has the highest percentage of minority students in the state; it also has the highest percentage of free/reduced lunch students among the six largest districts in the state. (Refer to Tables 1 and 2, page 5)

When the scores for middle schools students on the Florida Writes! Exam are compared across the six largest, high minority districts, Dade County emerges with 82% of its students scoring 3 or higher. (In order for a middle school to avoid the critically low-performing list, 50% of its students must score 3 or higher). Table 4 compares Dade County's score with the other five largest districts with above state average minority percentages and includes percentage of students in each district receiving free/reduced lunch.

Table 4: Free/Reduced Lunch/Florida Writes! Comparisons of Dade County Middle Schools with Five Other Districts

District	#MS Students	% Free/Reduced Lunch	% of Schools in District above State Average for Free/Reduced Lunch	% Scoring 3 or Higher on Florida Writes! Exam (1997)
Dade County	75,028	64.0	85.7	82
District #2	48,016	39.9	48.5	83
District #3	30,399	49.7	58.6	89
District #4	31,659	28.2	23.1	87
District #5	28,944	47.4	60.9	79
District #6	29,133	46.3	52.2	81

Compiled from data from State Education Information and Accountability Services, School Indicators Reports, and the State Assessment Office

Although it appears that Dade County middle schools are performing near the median among these six districts, the socioeconomic conditions are considerably different in Dade County. Because of the high percentage of free/reduced lunch students in Dade County, another way of looking at the data was devised so that scores could be compared within categories of schools across these six districts. The 125 schools in the other districts were rank-ordered with regard to percent of free/reduced lunch students. Ranges were established and combined average scores calculated for each range. The same rank-ordering was done for the 48 middle schools in Dade County and averages calculated for each range. Table 5 shows the results:

Table 5: Comparing Dade County Middle School Florida Writes! Scores With Five Other Districts Within Free/Reduced Lunch % Ranges

	Other Districts		Dade County	
% of Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch (Range)	**# of Schools (% of total #)**	**Average % Scoring 3 or Above on Florida Writes! Exam**	**# of Schools (% of total #)**	**Average % Scoring 3 or Above on Florida Writes! Exam**
75.1 - 90	9 (7%)	70.3	16 (33.3%)	75.5
60.1 - 75	21 (17%)	77.9	16 (33.3%)	80.3
45.1 - 60	30 (24%)	78.3	9 (19%)	83.1
30.1 - 45	31 (25%)	84.5	3 (6.1%)	87.0
15.1 - 30	21 (17%)	91.0	4 (8.3%)	95.3
0 - 15	13 (10%)	93.5	0	
Total	**125**		**48**	

Compiled from data from State Information and Accountability Services and State Assessment Office

It is interesting to note that Dade County has no middle school with less than 15% of its students receiving free/reduced lunches, and the number of schools at the high end of the ranges (75.1 - 90%) is 16 for Dade County compared with 9 for the other five counties combined. When we compare students' performances across the socioeconomic categories (as defined by % receiving free/reduced lunch), it appears that students in Dade County are "beating the odds" on the Florida Writes! Exam. To what extent are they beating the odds? Using a function of the Excel program that forecasts a value along a linear trend by using existing values, the predicted score, using free lunch as the existing value, was 76% scoring 3 or higher. The actual result for Dade County middle school students was 82% scoring 3 or higher.

What about high school students in Dade County? Are they, too, beating the odds? Table 6 was created using percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch at the high school level as a basis for comparing Florida Writes! scores.

Table 6: Comparing Dade County High School Florida Writes! Scores with Five Other Districts within Free/Reduced Lunch % Ranges

	Other Districts		Dade County	
% of Students Receiving Free/Reduced Lunch (Range)	**# of Schools (% of total #)**	**Average % Scoring 3 or Above on Florida Writes!**	**# of Schools (% of total #)**	**Average % Scoring 3 or Above on Florida Writes!**
>40.1	15 (16%)	81.1	9 (30%)	85.2
25.1 - 40	27 (28%)	85.9	11 (37%)	87.5
10.1 - 25	43 (46%)	86.9	10 (33%)	89.5
<10	9 (10%)	93.0	0	
Total	**94**		**30**	

Compiled from data from State Education Information and Accountability Services and School Indicators Report

Here, too, the Dade County high school students have, on an average, scored higher than their socioeconomic counterparts in the other five districts. The difference in the number of ranges used here compared with the middle school data reflects the fact that fewer high school students who are eligible actually apply for free or reduced lunch. Even with fewer eligible high school students applying for free/reduced lunch, Dade County still had no high schools with less than 10% free/reduced lunch. In general, the free/reduced lunch average percentages decline from elementary to high school years with high school percentages across the six districts approximately half of what they are for middle schools. (48 % of middle school students across the six districts get free/reduced lunch compared with 24% of high school students.)

Thus far in this report, the Florida Writes! scores of Dade County have been compared with other similar counties across the state. Overall, Dade County scores have looked good, given the students' socioeconomic conditions. However, not every school in the district has fared well. Thirty-eight elementary schools were on the state's original critically low-performing list as determined by the percentage of students in each school scoring 3 or higher on the Florida

Writes! Exam. (Elementary schools must have 33%, middle schools must have 50%, and high schools must have 67% of their students scoring 3 or higher in order to avoid being placed on the critical list.) Ten of these elementary schools were still on the critically low-performing list at the end of the 1997 school year. The range of scores in these 10 schools in the 1997 testing was 12% to 29%, with a median score of 21% passing. The populations in these schools average 98% minorities, with 96.6% eligibility for free/reduced lunch.

Could the odds against these schools be overcome? The Florida Writes! Project, a two-week summer workshop with follow-up sessions and coaching during the school year, was codesigned by the Division of Language Arts/Reading and a local university to help the teachers in these schools focus on strategies to help their students improve their writing skills. Although teachers from 22 of the 38 eligible schools participated in the project, the data included in Table 7 below only includes those 10 elementary schools that were still on the critical list in 1997.

Table 7: Pre and Post Intervention Florida Writes! Scores in Critically Low-Performing Dade County Elementary Schools

	----------Pre Intervention----------				-----Post----- Intervention
Year	**94**	**95**	**96**	**97**	**98**
	Mean Score		Mean (% Passing)		
School 1	n/a	n/a	2.0 (20%)	2.2 (21%)	2.6 (52%)
School 2	2.2	2.3	2.2 (28%)	2.1 (21%)	2.5 (42%)
School 3	1.5	1.8	1.6 (8%)	2.0 (29%)	2.2 (34%)
School 4	1.5	1.6	1.9 (13%)	1.8 (19%)	2.3 (31%)
School 5	1.5	1.5	1.7 (13%)	1.8 (21%)	2.5 (44%)
School 6	1.5	1.8	1.9 (20%)	2.1(21%)	2.5 (51%)
School 7	1.4	1.9	2.2 (28%)	2.0 (18%)	2.7 (60%)
School 8	1.4	1.6	1.8 (9%)	2.1 (27%)	2.7 (56%)
School 9	1.5	2.1	1.9 (20%)	1.9 (17%)	2.4 (41%)
School 10	1.5	1.7	1.6 (7%)	1.7 (12%)	2.1 (23%)
School Mean	**1.6**	**1.8**	**1.9 (17%)**	**2.0 (20%)**	**2.5 (43%)**
District Mean	**2.1**	**2.4**	**2.5**	**2.6 (48%)**	**3.0**
State Mean	**2.2**	**2.4**	**2.5**	**2.6 (46%)**	**3.0**

Compiled from data from Dade County School District Assessment Office

An analysis of the scores indicates that the project positively influenced student performance on the Florida Writes! Exam in participating schools. After the 1997 summer project, nine out of

the ten schools more than or nearly doubled the percentage of students scoring 3 or above on the test. In School #3, the increase was not as dramatic, but was enough to get the school removed from the critical list. Even the two schools, #4 and #10, who did not meet the state criteria of 33% scoring 3 or above, showed marked improvements in scores over the two previous years. Not only did students in project schools perform better than students in the same schools in the years prior to the project, as indicated in the above table, but they also, on average, outperformed students from schools who were eligible to participate in the project, but did not (Report to BOE by independent consulting firm, 1998).

Stanford Achievement Test. These local and statewide assessment results indicate that the students in Dade County are often outperforming their socioeconomic counterparts when compared with other districts across the state and are improving on previous years' performances when interventions are implemented. How do Dade County students fare when taking a national, norm-referenced test? School districts in Florida may choose which norm-referenced test is administered countywide. Dade County and three of the other large districts that have been used for comparative purposes in this study use the Stanford Achievement Test. Dade County middle school students' reading scores on the Stanford were compared to middle school students in those three districts and the results are illustrated in Table 8:

Table 8: Middle School Stanford Achievement Test Scores (Reading)

	Other Districts		Dade County	
% Students Receiving Free/ Reduced Lunch (Range)	**# of Schools**	**Average % Scoring Above Median**	**# of Schools**	**Average % Scoring Above Median**
80.1 - 90	0	n/a	10	18.8
70.1 - 80	7	28.4	12	28.5
60.1 - 70	9	40.3	10	34.6
50.1 - 60	7	43.6	7	37.4
40.1 - 50	9	46.8	3	49.6
30.1 - 40	11	54.8	2	50.5
20.1 - 30	3	62.0	2	59.5
10.1 - 20	3	68.0	2	73.0
Total	**49**		**48**	

Compiled from data from 1997 School Indicators Reports

On the norm-referenced reading tests, Dade County middle school students do not appear to be outperforming their socioeconomic counterparts in other districts except for students in schools where the percentage receiving free or reduced lunch is less than 20%, although percentage above median is *slightly* higher in two other categories as well. The lowest scores, consistent with the writing scores, are in schools where the highest percentage of students (>80%) are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Note that the three other districts have no schools in this category.

The Division of Language Arts/Reading in Dade County is very aware of the need to improve the reading abilities of the students within the district. Their concentrated efforts since the early 1980s in the area of writing have paid off, and a plan has been initiated this year that will address the reading needs of students more comprehensively than ever before. It will be interesting to watch the progress in this district in the area of reading over the next few years. Will they just continue to hold their own, or will they "beat the odds" in reading as they have done in writing?

CONCLUSIONS

The case study presented here illustrates the impact that close working relationships between central office staff and the teachers within the district can have on teacher professional development and on student achievement. Part of a larger study on Excellence in English, the three major goals of this case study were: 1) to determine the philosophy that guides the central office staff as they interact with the teachers, 2) to examine the nature of the interactions between central office staff and teachers, and 3) to determine the impact of these interactions on student achievement.

In efforts to understand the context in which these interactions were taking place, it quickly became evident that the students had the odds stacked against them for exhibiting high levels of performance. They are part of a statewide educational system that, historically, has not been held in high regard either for its educational programs or its teacher preparation; they belong to one of the largest, most diverse school districts in the nation; the percentage of minority students (86.5%) is significantly higher than the other largest districts in the state, as is the percentage of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

While the State Department of Education over the last several years has worked diligently to raise the standards of education in Florida, it is the challenge of those who work within each district to prepare the students to meet the higher standards. The task becomes even more challenging when the demographics are those of Dade County. Yet, the performances of Dade County students on statewide assessments such as the Florida Writes! Exam indicate that the students are beating the odds against them and outperforming their socioeconomic counterparts in other districts across the state. After studying the interactions between the central office staff and the teachers, it is clear that these strong relationships make a difference in the level of the teachers' professional development, and ultimately, positively impact student achievement.

The central office staff has a cohesive philosophy that guides their interactions with teachers. This philosophy is shaped by their understandings of the current research in their discipline and is firmly grounded in their working knowledge of classrooms. The staff works collaboratively with each other to further refine their understandings by sharing the research and literature, and by using it to develop workshops and materials for the teachers in the field. They are driven by a passion for teaching and learning and by a sense of humanity that allows them to bring their expertise to teachers in unique and special ways.

Not unexpectedly, the nature of the interactions between central office staff and teachers revolved around issues of professional development. In teasing the interactions apart, four support strategies for promoting teacher development or expertise were identified: 1) bringing a wide range of experts to the teachers, 2) seeing the teachers themselves as experts, 3) becoming experts with the teachers, and 4) letting the teachers know they are special. Each of these strategies contributes not only to the development of the teachers but also to their sense of belonging to a professional group. The director calls it "bringing the teachers into the fold;" one of the teachers who benefits from these interactions calls it "feeling like being a member of an elite group of educational giants."

A focal point for the interactions in this district is the annual Writing Institute which provides opportunities for teachers and central office staff to learn from invited experts in the field as well as from the experts within the district. The intense two-week workshop contributes to the professional development of all who attend, but it is not simply a two-week event; it also provides the basis for ongoing intellectual dialogues throughout the year and opportunities for interactions within the classrooms as central office staff do demonstration lessons or observe and

give feedback and support to teachers as the teachers implement strategies learned at the institute.

Because of the close ties and professional relationships that have developed among the Dade County English teachers and the central office staff, we are presented with a model for replacing traditional "departments, hierarchies, and cubbyhole structures of schooling" (Hargreaves, 1994) with a collaborative, collegial, and highly supportive professional environment (Fullan, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1996). This group has been able to "scale" their efforts for improving teaching practices in ways that work for them, as opposed to what Elmore (1996) calls large-scale efforts for reform that seldom are implemented with any success.

This study has established that the nature of the interactions between central office staff and teachers in Dade County, both quantitatively and qualitatively, is high, and that this high degree of interaction contributes to the professional development of the teachers. It is also evident that the degree of interaction has a positive impact on student performance. Since the early 1980s, the Division of Language Arts/Reading in Dade County has made a concentrated effort to improve the writing abilities of students across the county by providing intensive professional support for teachers. Their efforts have paid off; Dade County students are beating the odds and outperforming their socioeconomic counterparts in other districts across the state on the Florida Writes! Exam. The link between central office efforts and improved student performance can most clearly be seen in the cases where pre test and post test scores were available. In the incidences within Dade County where schools were not performing up to state standards, measures were taken through the central office to provide additional support for teachers in these schools. After the teachers received specific training from central office staff in teaching writing skills, students in eight of the ten participating schools improved their scores beyond what was needed to meet the state standards. The strength of the link is also demonstrated by the results of the Reciprocal Teaching Project where teachers in eight schools received specific training from the central office educational specialists in teaching reading comprehension strategies. Students in these teachers' classes not only posted a net gain of 19.75% on a postintervention comprehension test, they also posted an average 3 point comprehension gain on a districtwide standardized test after learning the comprehension strategies from their teachers.

The findings of this case study support what we already know about the professional development of teachers: that the best support they can have is interactive and ongoing and contributes to their sense of belonging to a professional group. What is unusual in this district is

the degree to which the Division of Language Arts/Reading staff has taken the responsibility for providing this support in ways that keep their teachers engaged in the profession and productive in the classroom. What may be just as important is the way these interactions can be directly linked to student achievement. The Division of Language Arts/Reading in Dade County could be a model for other districts, particularly those districts where the odds are against student achievement.

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Electronic Resources for Historical and Statistical Information:

(These sites were searched in May and June, 1998, and
as is the case with websites, are subject to revision and deletion.)

History of statewide assessment program in Florida:

http://www.firn.edu/doe/sas/hsaphome.htm

District background information:

http://dcps.dade.k12.fl.us/district/

Statistical data from State Department of Education:

School Indicators Reports: http://www.firn.edu/cgi-bin/doe_report.pl

State-wide test scores: http://www.firn.edu/doe/sasshome.htm

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1. Your position:

____ elementary school teacher	___ state ed. agency staff	___ policy maker
____ middle school teacher	___ professional developer	___ researcher
____ high school teacher	___ school administrator	___ education writer
____ college teacher/professor	___ district administrator	other_____

2. Clarity

	Very well				Not at all	
a. The concepts in this report were clearly expressed.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. This report was well organized.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

3. Utility

a. Reading this report gave me new information or insight into teaching or learning.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
b. This report helps the reader understand a current and important problem in education from a different perspective	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
c. I found the ideas offered in this report to be feasible given current realities of policy and practice.	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

4. Any other comments or suggestions regarding this report or additional research needs in the area of English and language arts teaching and learning are greatly appreciated.

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